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Lost Chords and Christian Soldiers: The Sacred Music of Sir Arthur Sullivan by Ian C. Bradley (review)

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Journal of a Tour . . . Undertaken to Collect Materials for a General History of Music. The most interesting passages are not the ones in which he lectures on the past, but the snapshots of his famous contemporaries: Johannes Brahms visiting the Hochschule as Joachim's personal guest (pp. 118, 129); the Viennese pianist Wilhelm Berger reporting on the hostile atmosphere among musicians in Vienna (pp. 138–39); Franz Liszt's old maidservant Miss Pauline, still in charge of the Hofgärtnerei at the time of Leichtentritt's visit, personally receiving visitors "with enthusiastic pride and vivacity" (p. 138); Richard Strauss at the premiere of his *Salome* in Dresden, which Leichtentritt attended and described as "the most sensational operatic event of the entire twentieth century" (p. 146); and the Meiningen Orchestra performance of Brahms, which surpassed even that of the great Berlin orchestras under Nikisch and Weingartner (p. 130).

Of particular interest is Leichtentritt's encounter with Arnold Schoenberg. No fan of Schoenberg's modernist scores, Leichtentritt wrote some unfavorable reviews of the composer. Their personal relationship started off badly. In the 1920s Leichtentritt was charged to approach the famous man and ask his help with the establishment of an International Society for Jewish Music. Schoenberg's angry refusal "to collaborate in any activities for Jewish music" shocked the Berlin Committee. Leichtentritt "felt so insulted by the haughtiness of his phraseology and the utter lack of sympathy and cooperation that [he] directed to him one of the shortest, but most violent letters of reproach that [he has] ever written" (p. 410). After emigrating to the United States, Schoenberg and Leichtentritt ended up as honorary presidents of a Jewish Music and Art Society in Boston. The irony of the situation was not lost on Leichtentritt.

After such an illustrious musicological career in Germany, the United States could only disappoint. Leichtentritt's attempts to publish English translations of his most important German books, the two volumes of the *History of the Motet* and his *Musical Form*, failed initially: there seems to have been no market for such books in the United States. Nor could he build a reputation as a composer: famous conductors, he complained, ignored his music because he had "too little sensation for their needs" (p. 514). Neither did his efforts to establish musicology as a legitimate subject of study at Harvard University, where he was a lecturer until he reached the retirement age of sixty-five, meet with success. Without a secure position and income, Leichtentritt withdrew from the public, carrying out his scholarly work "at home, sustained by an innate optimism" (p. 514). Leichtentritt's *A Musical Life in Two Worlds* was thus tellingly lopsided: the European side, especially after it receded into memory, became a golden age, hardly equaled by the unfulfilled promises of the New World. It took decades before Leichtentritt and his fellow German refugee colleagues' "innate optimism" overcame resistance and musicology became established in American academia. Leichtentritt did not live to document the change. He left his extensive library and manuscripts to the University of Utah, from where his student Leroy Robertson transferred his papers to the Harvard Musical Association, which published his autobiography with Mark DeVoto's copious footnotes. Leichtentritt's autobiography is not an easy read: its language is often heavy and too detailed (long passages from Leichtentritt's travel diaries could have been omitted). But it is a precious resource for those interested in the intellectual life of interwar Europe and the United States. Through Leichtentritt's memoir we see that American musicology owes a great debt to German refugees intent on saving what they could of their old world. Europe's loss was our gain.

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Lost Chords and Christian Soldiers: The Sacred Music of Sir Arthur Sullivan. By Ian C. Bradley. London: SCM Press, 2013. [xii, 239 p. ISBN 9780334044215. £25] Appendices, bibliography, discography, index.

Few serious composers have suffered as much as Sir Arthur Sullivan (1842–1900) from their association with "light music." Collaborating with W. S. Gilbert on the celebrated Savoy operas—*The Mikado*, *The*

Pirates of Penzance, Trial by Jury, and others—Sullivan achieved enormous fame and earned a reputation as a musician of unsurpassed grace and wit. Such accolades were typically double-edged, however, and were often accompanied by regret that a composer of such promise should waste his talent on mere "fooling." Sullivan himself felt the truth of the criticism and throughout his career endeavored to silence his detractors with "serious" cantatas and odes, songs, orchestral and chamber music, and even a grand opera. These works were successful to a degree, but their popularity began to wane in the early twentieth century in the wake of a general reaction against all things Victorian. Indeed, the theory grew up in these years that Sullivan had not merely prostituted himself but was, in fact, constitutionally incapable of writing anything but insincere and vulgar music. The lightweight frivolity of the Savoy operas, and the mawkish sentimentality of parlor favorites like "The Lost Chord," seemed for many to mark his true métier as a composer, with the consequence that his serious music, itself shaped by a similar Victorian aesthetic, was dismissed as a matter of course.

These critics reserved special censure for Sullivan's sacred music: the anthems, hymntunes, sacred cantatas, oratorios, and songs that likewise partook of this emotional world. Part of their complaint was with the outright sentimentalism of Victorian popular religion itself, the endless procession of guardian angels, heavenly thoughts, and "sacred" hearths and homes that directly inspired Sullivan's lilting melodies and syrupy harmonies. But the composer's materialism and worldliness, his notorious womanizing and gambling, played its part too, suggesting an element of false piety in these works and ultimately fueling the charge of artistic insincerity. According to Ian Bradley, however, Sullivan's religious faith was genuine, the product of a "spiritual quality of innocence" (p. 13) and a principled Broad Church liberalism that stressed a nondogmatic approach to the gospels. If worldly pleasures prompted him to emphasize the secular in his music, still a strong "spiritual yearning" remained (p. 183). As he put it in an 1885 newspaper interview: "My sacred music is that on which I base my reputation as a composer. These works are the offspring of my liveliest fancy, the children of my greatest strength, the products of my most earnest thought and most incessant toil" (p. 1).

Bradley is fighting a series of overlapping prejudices here, and he wisely tackles them one chapter at a time. First is the strong bias against Sullivan's music, the blame for which he lays squarely at the feet of an elitist British musical establishment long suspicious of popular and material success. (He makes an interesting analogy between Sullivan and another industrious Englishman of the popular theater, Andrew Lloyd Webber, whose music has likewise been reviled by critics.) Second is the sentimentality of Victorian religious culture itself, which he engagingly explains and defends with reference to tumultuous times. Here, the social upheavals of the industrial revolution, the strict antimaterialism of the romantic movement, above all the nineteenth-century crisis of faith (to which an exaggerated religious expression would seem to be a kind of counterintuitive and counterfactual response) are all seen to play their part. A third, biographical chapter tracing the composer's years as a boy chorister in the Chapel Royal provides an opportunity to explore Sullivan's staunch royalism and the worldliness that developed partly as a consequence of the aristocratic contacts he made there. But Bradley also makes it clear that the experience introduced him to some of the most important figures in Anglican musical circles—Thomas Helmore, Frederick Arthur Gore Ouseley, Joseph Barnby, and John Stainer among them—and asserts that it had a significant impact on his religious faith.

Having thus introduced the main themes of the book, Bradley goes on to deploy them in a genre-by-genre discussion of the sacred music itself. Chapter 4 focuses on Sullivan's sixty-one original hymntunes (and seventy-five harmonizations and/or arrangements of existing melodies), thoroughly classifying them by style and mood and defending them against the attacks of later critics. Bradley rightly sees these tunes as central to the Victorian hymn explosion, one of the most striking cultural developments of the age, but rejects the suggestion that the composer jumped on the publishing bandwagon and wrote them merely for money. Chapter 5 mounts a similar defense

of the eighteen sacred solo ballads and eight part-songs, parlor genres whose popularity peaked in the Victorian period and whose often "morbid sentiment" (p. 104) prompted some of his most treacly music. Bradley acknowledges all this, and yet insists that these works resonated personally with Sullivan, who knew death firsthand, and that these works were in no way cynically motivated by financial gain. Chapter 6 examines the large-scale choral music, focusing especially on the sophisticated librettos of the oratorios *The Prodigal Son* and *The Light of the World* (compiled by Sullivan himself, possibly with the assistance of George Grove) as evidence of his biblical learning and broad churchmanship. Bradley notes in these sacred works a strong dose of Savoy secularism and energy that livens up this often dreary genre. Chapter 7 tackles the twenty-odd anthems and liturgical works, dwelling especially on the two Festival Te Deums that the composer wrote for national occasions and that likewise mix sacred and secular elements, while chapter 8 provides a brief survey of select moments in the secular works, including some of the Savoy operas, that shed light on Sullivan's religious views. A concluding ninth chapter sums up the main points of the book.

Bradley's knowledge of the Sullivan corpus and literature is vast: he neatly refers to many of the composer's works and smoothly incorporates opposing scholarly viewpoints in a wide-ranging discussion. He is also very good on the larger context, explaining not only the psychological and sociological causes of Victorian sentimentality, as noted, but also where Sullivan's church music fits within the party factionalism of Anglican worship (though he is a little inconsistent when measuring the influence of Tractarianism here). Important trends in domestic and community music making—advances in piano manufacturing, government-sponsored music training, Tonic Sol-fa instruction, church music publishing, and oratorio performance—are pithily presented and judiciously related to the culture of "self-improvement and adult education" (p. 29) that was one of the defining features of the era. Developments in art music, too, receive due attention. The crucial impact of Felix Mendelssohn on the religious tone of Victorian music, including Sullivan's, is beautifully addressed, and an important passage on improved standards in nineteenth-century church music provides a context in which to assess Sullivan's contributions in that area.

There are a few errors and lacunae. Johann Sebastian Bach was hardly the "founder" of the oratorio (p. 28), nor did that genre typically employ hymntunes for congregational singing (p. 128) (Stainer's *The Crucifixion* is unusual in this regard). Bibliographic references—author's names, article titles, etc.—are sometimes missing, and more than a few passages crying out for citation receive none. Of more concern is the imprecise identification of the "musical establishment," a bogeyman throughout the book, which Bradley wrongly treats as a unified block. The groups variously invoked under this label—popular journalists of the day, highly-placed church musicians like Stainer and Barnby, the "academics" of the so-called English Musical Renaissance (including Charles Villiers Stanford and Hubert Parry), twentieth-century hymnologists like Erik Routley—occupied very different critical niches than are asserted here, and indeed the first two were sometimes very supportive of the "serious" Sullivan, as the discussion clearly shows. Finally, it is a shame that there are no music examples in the book. However understandable, the decision to omit them means that assessing the *quality* of Sullivan's music, especially the sentimental works so crucial to the central argument, remains unfulfilled.

Whether Bradley makes his case about Sullivan's religious faith is a more difficult question. Inconveniently, the composer was quite reticent about his religious observance, and this compels the author to piece together somewhat impressionistic evidence from diaries and letters, not always convincingly. He makes too much of Sullivan's "more than occasional" church attendance after quitting his last organist post in 1872 (p. 16), a tellingly convoluted phrase whose doubtfulness is confirmed by the intelligence that, in later life, the composer usually went to church, not on his own, but only when visiting aristocratic friends and patrons (p. 62). The notion that Sullivan's faith won over the cynical and ever-ironic Gilbert in their collaboration on the sacred music drama *The Martyr of Antioch* seems like wishful thinking. Even

the erudite biblical knowledge displayed in the oratorio librettos offers no proof of belief, because elaborate textual cross-referencing was typical of the genre and was indeed a professional necessity. Equally unconvincing is Bradley's attempt to repackage Sullivan's faith as "spirituality." It is doubtless true that the composer was unstintingly kind and generous, attracted to the ethical ideals of freemasonry, and worked hard to soften Gilbert's vicious satire and invest Savoy characters with "nobility and dignity" (p. 175). But these and other proofs of a deep humanity are still something different from active religious faith. The fascinating idea that Sullivan's music intentionally combines and reconciles the sacred and the secular, the worldly and the unworldly, "high" and "low," in a manner akin to Ludwig van Beethoven's Ninth Symphony, is a worthy one that deserves further exploration. But it remains a poor vehicle to affirm conventional religious belief if only because so broad a conception of "spirituality" is virtually indistinguishable from nineteenth-century ideas of transcendental art.

Ultimately, though, Bradley does successfully make the case for Sullivan's "simple, trusting faith" in the afterlife (p. 181). Such belief may well have been a cliché of the period, a commonplace of Victorian secular culture just as it is of our own, but it is hard to escape the conclusion that Sullivan's most fervent moments of devotion arose in response to the death of loved ones, and that he found relief on those occasions in the process of praying. Nor does it seem that he ever wavered in this view. In all his scourings of the letters and diaries, Bradley has found no evidence of an adult crisis of faith or struggle with belief, as there surely would be if this onetime choirboy ever drifted towards serious doubt. What he does find, though, is a suggestion of guilt, or at least of inadequacy. One of the most striking observations of the book is that the themes of repentance and of God's unwarranted mercy and grace dominate the sacred texts that Sullivan chose to set. Could it be that he viewed his sacred music, which as noted above he valued above all, as a counterpoise, perhaps even a corrective, to his worldly appetites? However oblique, that would indeed be evidence of religious faith.

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Schoenberg and Redemption. By Julie Brown. (New Perspectives in Music History and Criticism.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. [xiv, 259 p. ISBN 9780521550352 (hardcover), $99; ISBN 9781139949965 (e-book), $79.] Music examples, illustrations, appendix, notes, bibliography, index.

Julie Brown's *Schoenberg and Redemption* newly testifies to the power of a composer's self-expressive prose. Two documents from 1934 to 1935 unlock the door to Brown's original intervention in the populous arena of Schoenberg scholarship: an understanding of the motivation behind Schoenberg's turn to atonality, or as he called it, the emancipation of dissonance. Schoenberg's confessional private essay "Every young Jew" (1934) and his Mailamm (American–Palestine Institute of Jewish Musical Sciences) address of 29 March 1935 are fundamental to Brown's evaluation of Schoenberg's early acceptance of Richard Wagner's *Deutschtum* and his anti-Semitic tract, "Judaism in Music" (1850). As she argues, the two works provide key evidence for Schoenberg's motivation to strike out on a new path in composition as a means to redemption for himself as a Jew, and of German music.

Reinhold Brinkmann has observed: "Schoenberg's foundation of the Viennese atonality as a new paradigm for contemporary music, besides being embedded in a music-historical process, was indeed the reflection of a very specific and problematic historical, social, cultural and psychical situation in Vienna around 1900" (Reinhold Brinkmann, "Schoenberg the Contemporary: A View from Behind" in *Constructive*